

RELAY/GSE

Making the Exception the Norm

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Lessons Learned From
High Gaining Alumni of
Relay Graduate School of
Education National Principal
and Supervisors Academy



Executive Summary

Despite decades of reform efforts there remains a stark and troubling association between family income, race, and achievement in schools (Reardon, S., Ho, A., Fahle, E., Shear, B. 2019). Echoes of these headlines reverberate in the 2019 release of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results where most states show stagnant improvement in both mathematics and reading over the past decade (The Nation's Report Card, 2019).

Relay Graduate School of Education was established in 2011 to tackle this problem head on by providing high-quality, practice-based training to teachers and leaders who could develop in all students the academic skills and strength of character deemed necessary to succeed in college and life.

Founded in 2007 as Teacher U at Hunter College, and later, in 2011 as an independent, accredited institute of higher education, Relay Graduate School of Education was established to tackle this problem head on by providing high-quality, practice-based training to teachers and leaders who could develop in all students the academic skills and strength of character deemed necessary to succeed in college and life. Relay's flagship leadership programs, the National Principal Academy Fellowship (NPAF) and the National Principal Supervisors Academy (NPSA), are grounded in research showing that school leaders matter and that effective school leadership has a significant positive effect on outcomes, particularly in schools serving those students with the highest need. Both one year fellowships aim to better prepare school and system leaders to improve their skills in core instructional and cultural leadership so teaching and learning can allow all students to flourish.

Central to Relay's approach is the study and codification of "positive deviants," school leaders whose results positively deviate from the norm, for the purpose of defining exemplary practices and

sharing them at scale. Relay's work in leadership development has drawn extensively on the practices of positively deviant schools and leaders such as Uncommon Schools, a high performing network of charter schools in the northeast, now serving more than 19,000 predominantly low-income students who have consistently achieved impressive results. Through their research, Relay faculty have identified a diverse set of positive outlier school leaders from both district and charter schools around the country, who each led their schools to achieve substantial improvements in student achievement during their year engaged with Relay's Leadership Programs. Eager to learn about how these leaders translated what they learned while at Relay to drive gains in their schools, the team initiated this study to pursue answers to two overarching questions: "To what do these leaders attribute their success?" and "what are the implications for others working to improve schools that serve predominantly historically underserved students?"

After visiting, interviewing, and observing these leaders in practice, four themes emerged. Across the board, each leader, in their own way and within their own culture and context, relentlessly: 1) prioritized instructional leadership as the core function of the school leader; 2) used student work and academic achievement data to inform decision-making; 3) utilized frequent and targeted feedback loops with targeted practice with teachers and other instructional leaders in the building to drive improvement and growth; and 4) implemented change with a balance of drive and humility. This study lifts up the voices of these leaders to bring these themes to life and to demonstrate what this work looks and feels like in real schools it makes connections to the relevant research underpinning these leadership moves throughout and concludes with a set of recommendations for leaders moving forward who wish to learn from and apply the lessons learned within their own environments.

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Introduction

Relay Graduate School of Education was founded to “teach teachers and school leaders to develop in all students the academic skills and strength of character needed to succeed in college and life.” Initially formed to train a new generation of highly effective teachers, Relay launched its Leadership Programs in 2013-14 in order to provide practical, proven instructional and cultural leadership training to school leaders. In the 2019-20 school year, Relay’s Leadership Programs will provide training to almost 1500 school and system leaders through its National Principal Academy Fellowship, National Principal Supervisors Academy, Leverage Leadership Institute, and a portfolio of regional programming.

Relay’s Leadership Programs are grounded in research that tells us school leaders matter. Studies of school leadership have shown that principals can positively affect the mathematics and reading achievement of students in their schools (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Grissom, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2015) and additional research suggests that principals can have an estimated impact as high as 16 percentile points or an effect size of 0.21 (Branch et al., 2013). In fact, some researchers suggest there are virtually no instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader (Leithwood, Louis, & Anderson, 2004, p.7) and that many existing leadership programs may not be producing the quantity or quality of impactful leaders necessary to affect positive change. Survey data have shown that superintendents are generally not satisfied with the quality of many existing principal preparation programs, highlighting the need for improvement (Mendels & Wallace Foundation, 2016).

Relay’s work in leadership development has drawn extensively on the practices of positively deviant schools and leaders, namely Uncommon Schools, winner of the 2014 Broad Prize for Public Charter Schools. In particular, Relay’s approach to principal development has employed the codification of Uncommon’s approach described in Leverage Leadership (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012) which describes seven “levers” of leadership. These levers have

Instructional Levers

- **Data Driven instruction** Define the roadmap for rigor and adapt teaching to meet students’ needs.
- **Observation and feedback** Give all teachers professional, one on one coaching that increases their effectiveness as instructors.
- **Instructional planning** Guarantee every student well structured lessons that teach the right content.
- **Professional development** Strengthen both culture and instruction with hands on training that sticks.

Cultural Levers

- **Student Culture** Create a strong culture where learning thrives.
- **Staff culture** Build and support the right teams for your school.
- **Managing school leadership teams** Train instructional leaders to expand your impact across the school.

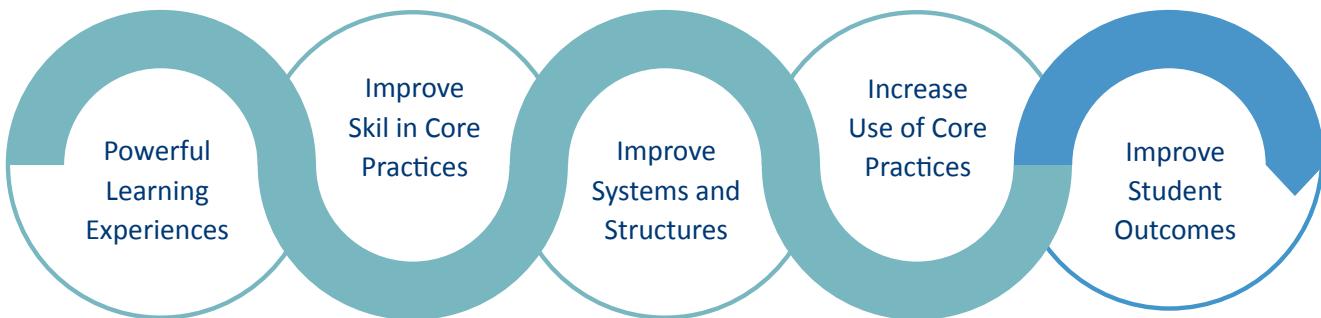
(Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012, p.10)

been developed, honed, and employed by leaders across Uncommon Schools and throughout Relay’s leadership development programs. The levers exist as both instructional and cultural leadership competencies that Bambrick-Santoyo asserts school leaders must proficiently employ if they wish to affect positive change for students.

Relay’s flagship programs, the National Principal Academy Fellowship (NPAF) and the National Principal Supervisors Academy (NPSA) aim to provide school and system leaders with intensive, high quality training aimed at helping leaders improve their skills in relation to these core instructional and cultural leadership levers. Participants engage in a mix of in-person (~20 days) training over the course of the year and site-based practice where they capture videos of themselves putting into practice the skills they have learned. Participants work closely with practitioner experts who provide feedback on their practice and implementation.

Central to Relay’s mission is its insistence that the teachers and leaders it trains leave with new knowledge and skills that increase the likelihood they will see measurable positive impact from their work. Troubled by

the extensive evidence that suggests most professional development efforts fail to yield measurable impact on participant performance or student achievement, Relay's Leadership Programs have developed a robust theory of action that explicitly names not only what gains are expected, but how the organization expects its program to yield measurable improvement in teaching and learning. Aligned to the work of Thomas Guskey (2002), Relay's Leadership Programs regularly collect data and assess impact against five levels of professional development evaluation:



Multiple sources of evidence suggest that Relay's Leadership Programs are having meaningful impact. A recent independent evaluation conducted by WestEd (Heredia & Nakamoto, 2019) demonstrates that the program has a positive effect on principal fellows and their ability to execute core instructional leadership functions like using data to improve teaching and learning, observing and coaching teachers, and developing positive school culture. These findings show that participants also report increased feelings of self-efficacy, a leadership attribute foundational to seeing improvement in student outcomes (Heredia, A., & Nakamoto, J. (2019). Specific examples of the impact of these programs include:

85%

of principal fellows indicated they “used student performance data for instructional improvement” as a result of Relay to a “great” or “considerable extent.”

82%

of principal fellows reported they were able to “facilitate student learning” and “create a positive learning environment” in their schools due to Relay’s program to a “great” or “considerable extent.”

85%

of principal fellows believed the feedback they learned to provide to teachers via their involvement in Relay “improved classroom instruction.”

Relay's Internal survey data confirms these findings with subsequent survey results showing:

90%

of fellows “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that Relay’s program prepared them to (1) lead coaching meetings that made time for teachers to practice ways to address feedback, and (2) deliver feedback in an effective manner.

96%

of fellows “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the program “led [them] to make improvements in [their] work.”

85%

of fellows “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the program improved their effectiveness as an instructional leader and increased their understanding of instructional and school leadership.

Relay regularly collects publicly released student achievement data from school leaders immediately following their year in the program for the purpose of continuous improvement and the identification of “positive outliers,” i.e. schools who have achieved significant gains in student achievement while serving historically underserved students (predominantly low-income, predominantly Black and Latinx or Hispanic students). Early data gathered from PK-12 school partners show trends where those who implemented the program with fidelity outperform peers in similar schools with respect to ELA and Math scores. As of 2018, more than 3 out of 5 Relay-led schools saw improvement in ELA and Math test scores, with almost 40% of schools seeing more than 5-point gains in one year.

In the spring of 2019, eager to build on these findings and provide leaders with even more impactful professional learning, Relay’s Leadership Programs Team launched an effort to dive deeper into the previous year’s student achievement results to answer a few key questions of interest:

1

From the 2017-18 cohort, which school leaders saw significant, measurable gains in student achievement following their year in the program?

2

To what do these leaders attribute their success?

3

Given these attributes, what are the implications for others who are working to improve schools that serve historically underserved students?



Methodology

The purpose of this study is to identify practical trends across a diverse group of leaders and schools who each saw substantial improvements in student achievement during the year they participated in Relay's NPAF and NPSA programs. This study was designed to provide internal and external stakeholders with insights into how successful leaders immediately took what they learned at Relay to achieve strong gains in their schools.

With these goals in mind, Relay assembled a team to analyze student achievement data from alumni school leaders, identify those leaders who saw substantial, measurable gains following their year in the program, and conduct structured interviews with a sample of these leaders in an effort to identify emergent trends that could inform future work. The leaders selected needed to meet specific criteria. Namely, they would:

- represent a diverse set of school types and geographies (both charter and district, large and small urban),
- represent a diverse set of leaders (gender, race, experience, etc.),
- serve predominantly students from historically underserved backgrounds (predominantly low income, majority non-white students),
- enter the program with limited or moderate knowledge of the core practices that they would learn while at Relay,
- achieve substantial (more than 5 percentage points) gains in both English Language Arts and mathematics on end-of-year, state-administered student achievement tests.

After close review of potential study candidates, the team selected the following leaders and sites as the focus of this study:

Leslie Frazier

(Female/AA)

School

Crispus Attucks
Public School 21



58%
ELA % >Prof.
2018

+26%*
% Gains ELA
from 2017

59%
Math % >Prof.
2018

+27%
% Gains Math
from 2017

Grade

PK- 5th grade

District/ CMO

NYC DOE

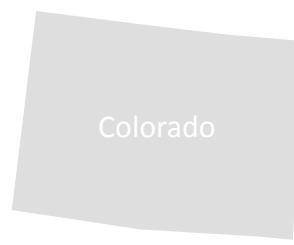
*While a change in test from 2017-18 may exaggerate the gains in year over year improvement, this school's gains remain considerably stronger than comparable schools in the same district.¹

Christina Sylvester

(Female/Hispanic or Latino/W)

School

Merrill Middle
School



54%
ELA % >Prof.
2018

+10%
% Gains ELA
from 2017

43%
Math % >Prof.
2018

+10%
% Gains Math
from 2017

Grade

6th-8th grade

District/ CMO

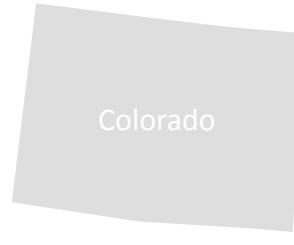
Denver Public
Schools

Anthony Asmus

(Male/W)

School

Centennial
Elementary



25%
ELA % >Prof.
2018

+9%
% Gains ELA
from 2017

28%
Math % >Prof.
2018

+14%
% Gains Math
from 2017

Grade

K-5th grade

District/ CMO

Greeley Public
Schools

Siobhan Gardner

(Female/AA)

School

KIPP South
Fulton Academy



Grade

5th-8th grade

District/ CMO

KIPP Metro
Atlanta

42%

ELA % >Prof.
2018

+5%

% Gains ELA
from 2017

46%

Math % >Prof.
2018

+10%

% Gains Math
from 2017

Dwight Ho Sang

(Male/AA)

School

KIPP West Atlanta
Young Scholars
Academy



Grade

5th-8th grade

District/ CMO

KIPP Metro
Atlanta

31%

ELA % >Prof.
2018

+4%

% Gains ELA
from 2017

31%

Math % >Prof.
2018

+8%

% Gains Math
from 2017



Interview Structure

We anchored our approach to interviews in a single question: What can we learn from a diverse set of leaders who saw substantial gains in student achievement following their year in NPAF and NPSA? We then structured participant interviews to gather answers to the following questions in support of that central line of inquiry:

- **What were the key drivers of your success?**
- **What did you prioritize?**
- **How did you spend your time?**
- **How did your participation in Relay impact teaching and learning in your building?**
- **How has it impacted your planning for next year's priorities?**

We recorded all interview data and then coded responses to identify patterns. While each leader shared some unique responses to these overarching questions, in their responses, a few important trends emerged.

Findings

Through our interactions with these principals, four important themes emerge. Echoing much of what they learned in the program, these leaders relentlessly:

- **Prioritized instructional leadership** as the core function of the school leader.
- Used **student work and academic achievement data to inform decision-making**.
- Utilized frequent and **targeted feedback loops with targeted practice** to drive improvement and growth.
- implemented change with **a balance of drive and humility**.

In the sections that follow, we use the voices of the leaders to describe how these themes came to life within their successful school improvement efforts.



Noise: Prioritizing the Levers that Matter Most

The Principal's Priority - Instructional Leadership

In a world where the role of the principal is crucial to student success, and where leaders are simultaneously called upon to perform such a broad swath of responsibilities for their school and community, questions of prioritization inevitably come to the fore. Indeed, understanding how school leaders prioritize effectively in order to focus on student learning is a core component of Relay's leadership programs. One clear pattern we noticed throughout our conversations was these leaders' ability to maintain a laser-like focus on their role as instructional leaders. Time and time again, those we encountered spoke of instructional leadership as both their primary responsibility and the highest leverage way for them to move the needle for the students they serve.

As observers of these leaders, we were struck by the sheer volume and variety of work they face. There are many professions that involve wearing multiple hats, but the principalship might take the prize for the most donned through the course of a typical day. At any given point in a school day, week, or month, a school leader might be called upon to demonstrate competence in educational law, school financing, human resource management, or operational logistics to name a few. This was a sentiment underlined by Christina Sylvester, Principal of Merrill Middle School, who reflected that, "in a lot of ways, we're the CEOs of small organizations."

Despite these potentially competing commitments, extensive research suggests that in order to improve student learning, schools must raise the level of content that students are taught, improve the skill and knowledge that teachers bring to the teaching of that content, and increase the level of students' active learning. By committing to their roles as instructional leaders, each of the principals we interviewed believed that the instructional core, what researchers described as the intersection of teachers, content, and students, is the locus with the greatest potential for student growth (City

et al, 2009). Stated simply, leaders who want to improve student outcomes must find ways to impact what takes place inside the classroom.

Christina Sylvester echoes this sentiment by naming "the work we do in classrooms for students every day" as her highest priority work. Similarly, Dwight Ho Sang of KIPP Ways Atlanta talked about how the role of principal has evolved over the course of his time as an educator. He shared how in his early days as a teacher, the principal "literally did everything" on both the operational and academic sides of school life. Now that he is a principal himself, he has built a team to oversee such operational items as transportation, food services, and human resources so that he can have comparatively unfettered focus on "coaching, academic development, moving kids (academically), and setting the culture for the school."

Ho Sang speaks with honesty as he describes the reality of leading schools: "You may have a student having a meltdown; you may have an upset parent - and then you have your weekly data meeting." Rather than losing sight of the bigger picture of instructional improvement, Ho Sang reminded us that this is precisely the moment when your commitment to that cause should hold firm: "You have to make sure your time is kept sacred, and sometimes it can feel like everything's an emergency. We don't want a student unsafe or a parent to feel like they're being ignored, but you have to make sure you honor your time consistently. At the end of the day, you have to coach and develop (teachers), so spend your time coaching and developing them."

Aligning Time and Task

Another key tenet of Relay's leadership programs is a focus on the management and alignment of time and task. Consistently, we found that each of these principals employ myriad strategies to protect their instructional focus from the competing commitments of school life. While difficult at times, their relentless protection of time and space for the critical work of instructional leadership was integral to the prioritization process.

Anthony Asmus, principal at Centennial Elementary in Greeley, Colorado described both his struggle to prioritize and how he felt strategically better equipped to deal with prioritization following his year in Relay's leadership program. Having attended Relay's summer leadership training, Asmus returned with clearly articulated instructional leadership priorities and the express intention of making regular feedback on instruction part of the culture of his building. At the same time, he acknowledged the organizational barriers that stood in the way of his achieving that goal. He recalled asking his Assistant Principal at the time, "How are we ever going to get feedback cycles for 20 people on our case load every single week, or every other week?" In response to his own charge, Asmus made changes that went beyond the surface of his approach to scheduling, roles and responsibilities - both for him as a leader and for those working around him. He painted a picture of the kind of wholesale change that took place after his Relay experience:

We had to clear our schedules. We had to prioritize our work, and we had to empower others. We had to let our dean be a dean and allow her to get out into the classrooms and work with students, and lead resets with teachers. We had to take our office manager and our secretary and just say, "You've got to help us with some of this work, possibly by doing triage work for us. If it's a parent that's coming to talk to us, great. You've got access to our calendars. Let's put them on the calendar."

Here, Asmus offers an insight into prioritization and instructional leadership that calls on people in the building (not to mention the wider community) to think differently about what the role of a principal can and should be. Asmus' approach prioritizes visiting classrooms and providing instructional feedback for teachers as the first and best calling of any school leader seeking to be effective in transforming outcomes for their students.

Time and again, principals articulated how they had to align their time to ensure that they did a few things well. Jondre Pryor, a Principal Supervisor at KIPP Ways Academy in Atlanta who attended the National Principal Supervisors Academy in 2017-18 and oversees both Gardner and

Ho-Sang, touched on this very point when he underlined the reality that principals and their supervisors have to contend with "a million competing priorities" and how part of the job as a leader is subsequently to "pick one thing". For Pryor, the question ringing in any leader's ears should be, "What are you going to prioritize that is going to be that one thing...that if you get that right, all the other things, they won't necessarily fall into place, but it's easier for those things to fall into place?" For some, this one thing may be to focus on school culture in setting the foundation for positive student experiences. For others, data driven instructional systems or observation and feedback were central to the school's strategic approach to improvement. From our observations, the leaders' successes were grounded in their ability to focus intently on the implementation of a lever of change, one that would bring about the greatest transformation within the instructional core.

Communicating the Vision

Principals working through Relay's leadership programs are encouraged to think deeply about how to communicate a vision of change for their school. For Leslie Frazier, Principal of Crispus Atticus Public School in Brooklyn, being true to one's focus and communicating that to the school and community-at-large were among the most important attributes of successful leaders. Frazier told us how, "Everyone in the building should know the priority, whether it be an academic goal or a socio-emotional goal and making them doable and visual and concise." This idea of communicating the one goal and a vision for its realization is here seen as yet another important step in the prioritization process. The journey to organizational change is, in this regard, inclusive as opposed to being privy only to those deemed to be the "leaders" of change.

In Leslie Frazier's school, everyone is an instructional leader because everyone has the potential to improve outcomes for the students they serve. As such, her focus on the business of instruction was not something she held as true for her leadership alone; it extended into her hopes for and expectations of everyone. When it came to the coaching role she played in her teachers' lives and the

picture of improvement she sought for her students, she came back to the same concept, “What is the one thing? Not three things, but what is the one thing that we’re going to be working on that I’m going to model for you and we’re going to try together?”

All the school leaders with whom we met described the importance of staying true to a policy of prioritization, concentrated their efforts on instructional improvement, and were then able to communicate that focus-as-expectation to others in their teams, essentially inviting them into the challenge. In so doing, these principals moved beyond a top-down espousal of the change they expected but instead moved towards something more aligned, operationalized, and inclusive. A key driver of these efforts at organizing for improvement was the manner in which they used the work of students and student data to determine their strategic approach.



What the research tells us...

Studies on prioritization of instructional leadership support what we saw happening in these schools.

According to City, Elmore, Fiarman & Tietel (2009) improving what takes place inside the “instructional core” where students, teachers, and content intersect is central to any effort aimed at improving teaching and learning outcomes. Extensive research has shown that observable teacher performance in the form of student assessment results and leader observations is a more reliable indicator of teacher effectiveness than measures such as credentials and experience (Gordon, Kane, Staiger, 2006). This is to say, prioritizing and concentrating on the business of what goes on in classrooms every day, embodied in the conception of an “instructional core”, is a highly effective strategy for improving long-term learning outcomes for students.

In addition, studies examining a wide range of school leadership research have concluded that effective leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn. The role of the leader has been seen as contributing up to a quarter of total school effects, with such effects usually proving largest when they are needed most. Indeed, there are virtually no instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader (Leithwood, Louis, & Anderson, 2004). The question of what school leaders do to bring about change, especially when the stakes are so high, has also been the subject of significant study. A 15-year meta-analysis of school effectiveness research found that effective goal setting is a potent lever for school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Similarly, it has been found that setting a vision, developing talent, and ensuring that the execution of the organization’s work is aligned to its mission were all part of the effective school leader’s skill set (Leithwood et al). It is clear from these studies that setting the table for school improvement in the form of a clear vision of change, an ability to prioritize, and a laser-like focus on instruction are all vital to the success of a school leader.

Using Student Work to Drive Decisions Student Work as Evidence of Student Learning

Student Work as Evidence of Student Learning

When it comes to student data, Relay's leadership programs are grounded in the belief that student work is among the strongest evidence of student learning. In keeping with this belief, each leader with whom we met stated that their gains were due in large part to their improved ability to leverage student work to make more informed instructional decisions. By employing research-informed approaches to student data use, honed through their Relay leadership learning experiences, these principals all implemented highly systematized and effective approaches to the close examination of student work. For them, close analysis of the work of students was integral to better understanding whether and how students have learned what teachers have taught.

Each of these leaders employed a version of Relay's weekly data meeting structure, where leaders are taught explicitly to support teachers to identify critical elements of successful student responses to rigorous, standards aligned tasks, analyze sample student work that illuminates a key misunderstanding, and develop an action plan to reteach this skill in future lessons. This practice became a key tenet of one alumna's approach, Christina Sylvester at Merrill Middle School, who drove home what it means to look closely at student work in order to improve teaching and learning in her building:

Since my participation in Relay, I really focus more than I ever have on (academic) standards. When I'm in a classroom, I call up the standard that the students are working on. I make sure that their work is aligned to the standard, and that it's aligned to the rigor of the standard. This makes me think intently about what they need to know and how they're going to do it.



Analyzing Student Work to Identify ‘the Gap’

Relay’s focus on the identification of instructional gaps is central to its approach. “The gap” in this instance is the space that exists between the work product created by the highest performing students (grade-level exemplars) and what the majority of students produce. True to this focus on closing gaps, the leaders with whom we met were able to name in concise terms an important, trending student error that could be closed with the help of future rounds of focused instruction. For Anthony Asmus at Centennial Elementary, identifying and attending to what he called the “highest leverage misconceptions” by reteaching the content and honing the instructional approach, became the most effective way to achieve a greater focus on those details that would move the needle for his students.

Asmus talked about how two interesting changes occurred once he started to focus on the gaps that had been illuminated by student data. First, the number and range of gaps themselves started to decrease. Second, teachers used their observations of student work to begin making predictions about the gaps that were likely to occur. Sure enough, when the subsequent rounds of student work were explored, predictions around which gaps would exist and why became more and more accurate. Asmus put this best when he said, “We weren’t being reactive anymore, we were becoming proactive.” This shift from lagging behind what student work was telling teachers towards getting out in front of the issue by identifying patterns in what students were and were not able to do allowed Asmus’ faculty to explore exemplars, refine their lesson plans, adapt their instructional choices, and carry out reteaches of the content - none of which would have been possible without a thoughtful and proactive approach to exploring student work.

In realising the power of student data to inform the instructional life of their schools, we noticed principals and instructional leaders affording their analysis of student work a high degree of prominence in the hierarchy of faculty activities. This, we found, happened

with particular effectiveness when the path to accessing student work was cleared and the collective attention of the faculty was directed to the details that mattered most for student success. Every leader we spoke to was quick to share the regularity with which student work is examined. In these schools, teams at the department and schoolwide level huddled around student work and data every week. In some cases, investment in more nimble and responsive data management systems meant that data could be pulled at a moment’s notice, such that the most up-to-date information possible could inform the reviewing of student work. Investing in data in these ways didn’t come without cost at the level of the time and capital that needed to be put aside - yet it was obvious that these leaders considered the investment worthwhile. Principals and their teams reported that exploring student data became a habit and was seen as a skill in itself that could be honed through practice. Principal Asmus reminded us of the importance of refining such an approach to data use through effective habits in this way:

So the kids are doing the work, we’re monitoring their work, we’re pulling that data. At least once a week we’re looking at student work. We’re identifying a gap within our high priority standards. We’re coming up with a reteach plan for that specific student deficit, and we’re putting that reteach plan back together, and rolling it out with students, and not just one time, but over time...So it’s continual practice, over and over and over around that strategy, and then we come back, we look at data, and we just find those high priority pieces and come back and reteach those.

We found that these principals saw their students and teachers as working along a similar developmental trajectory when it came to their relationship with student work and data. In the case of teachers, it was a journey to determine how and if their teaching is in fact leading to learning and identifying remaining learning gaps to close. All the principals with whom we met respected the commitment required to do this well and worked alongside their teachers to develop this important part of their practice.



As a Principal Supervisor, Jondre Pryor spoke to this when he shared the kinds of questions he encouraged those in his teams to ask of their practice. In Pryor's opinion, a teacher's development is best seen within the context of building content knowledge around standards in order to break them down and teach to that model. Pryor saw this as an act of internalization which can only come through practice and through the posing of questions which drive one's own growth:

You are taking a lot of time to fully understand the standard and the lesson you're going to teach so you can minimize mistakes. When you go in and teach that lesson and you get that exit ticket back, you see the results, then you come to this weekly data meeting, and you ask yourself, "Okay, what did I mess up here? What did the scholars not master? What items do we need to be analyzing to make sure my re-teach is super strong?"

Leslie Frazier at Crispus Atticus School noticed a similar trend in the questions her data teams and faculty started to ask following her experience at Relay. For Frazier,

questions such as, "What are we really looking at now? We have numbers, now what are we going to do with it?", were all about "getting to the bottom line" of what her teams saw playing out in their classrooms every day.

Student Data As a Mirror to the School

At Relay, student work is the compass that guides a leader to determine which levers to pull. For these principals, student work (at the individual and class level) and achievement data (at the grade and school level) served as a reliable and authentic indicator of whether teaching was, in fact, leading to learning. Here Siobhan Gardner explores how she uses student work to drive her daily interactions with staff and students at KIPP South Fulton:

Every night I go home and just look at the data, and I start sending emails to teachers, only praise around growth..."I noticed on this standard today they were at this" and I do a cut and paste of the graph..."This other day they got here. Nice work." Or I just look at the data and talk to teachers in passing around what's going on



What the research tells us...

Numerous researchers have cited the importance of having strong data-driven instructional systems that include cycles of continuous improvement, establishing a clear vision for schoolwide data use, providing supports that foster a data-driven culture, and maintaining data systems at the school and district level. (Hamilton et al, 2009).

This approach to data holds true with a recent study into the review of student work as a driver of student achievement. Researchers found that understanding what the level of mastery should look like for a given class (the ideal) and identifying student misconceptions (the gap) through reviews of student work were identified as practices that correlate with positive student achievement outcomes

(Hill & Chin, 2018).

in their class. Or I would memorize some data so I could praise kids around their growth, like when I'm greeting kids in the morning...Once I started in earnest paying attention to data, and not in a punitive way, but just sort of "I truly care about what's going on." I think it shifted the lens of teachers and leaders. It just changed the conversation.

Principal Gardner shared how, "People pay attention to what you pay attention to" which summed up for her how understanding student work and the data around it could be impactful and interpersonal all at once. Garner's version of understanding student data - paying attention to the things that matter, communicating those things to the people who can do something about it, and empowering those people to respond to it - is being observed in ever-more-thoughtful and effective ways. Leslie Frazier adds to this picture of the personal life of student work and data by asserting that it exists everywhere and is integral to the way a leader sees and responds to the students she serves:

Children need to believe, They can talk to and have a relationship with someone in the building who knows them really well. Especially, I would say, in this community, they need to trust that there is an individual who knows them and can identify them clearly by name and some of the things that are nuances about their personality and what they like and do not like...For me, that's a given priority and that's data. That's data that people don't always have and that makes it, to me, one of the most important things, because I know how to reach you. Someone will know how to reach you, and they'll take ownership making sure before you leave, you're reached.

Here, Frazier didn't see a distinction between data that is used to close gaps or address student misconceptions and that which is used to build trust, foster relationships and demonstrate a caring and inclusive culture. It is when knowledge of students and the best ways to care for them is shown and shared that school data comes to life.



Learning Loops: The Role of Feedback, Reflection and Practice in Driving Improvement

Focused, Frequent, and Practical Feedback

The principals with whom we met spoke to a shift they underwent in their approaches to practice and feedback, from rigid structures focused on compliance with mandatory district evaluation systems to something much more nuanced, accessible, and developmental. Anthony Asmus touched on this idea of leader-as-coach, embedded within a still systematized approach to feedback, when he described his own evolution in light of his Relay experience. Asmus talked about how he used to be a “By-the-book guy, where teachers get two evaluations a year” but that “it’s so different now that our goal is multiple times per month.” He was quick to note that his teachers were good, but they were not being given the chance to be their very best because the opportunities they had to work directly on their practice were so few and far between.

For Asmus, “It wasn’t until we started upping the number of times we got together that we tapped into the full potential of what a teacher can do.” Now, when he walks through his classrooms, Asmus sees higher degrees of engagement, greater consistency in the teaching strategies being employed, and higher expectations of students - all of which he attributes to the consistency and efficacy of a more robust and responsive culture of feedback. Of course, increased frequency alone does not necessarily make for a deliberate practice or feedback strategy. In addition to increased opportunities to practice and receive feedback was the leaders’ heightened focus on standards that mirrored the rigorous approach to student data explored earlier. Here, Christina Sylvetser from Merrill Middle School explains what an operationalized version of this can look like:

I have up to six instructional leadership team members who each have caseloads of teachers (of varying sizes) that allow us (as the building leaders) to have smaller caseloads. It allows us to do lesson plan review and feedback on a weekly basis. So by Friday we have a lesson plan template and grid, and we review it with our caseloads every Friday and give feedback. Taking a look at the standard, the content language objective,

how those are aligned to rigorous tasks, and how teachers are aware of the students' mastery of the standards at the end of every period is one of the ways we coach in addition to observation and feedback.

At Relay, commitment to deliberate practice (practice that targets the hardest and most important skill to improve) and feedback has become a driver of growth in the core skills instructional leaders should be able to foster in others and demonstrate themselves. In keeping with this, and just as we saw with data-informed decision making, these leaders spoke to a systematized and routinized approach to growth-through-feedback with clear expectations about the ‘who, what, and when’ of collective responsibilities contributing to teachers’ growth.

Balancing Instructional Complexity With Precision

Particularly striking in these school leaders’ approaches to instructional improvement was their acknowledgement of the complexities of classroom practice and the need to be precise with concrete, high-leverage, and actionable steps that teachers can take to ensure that all students learn. In order to build skills in everything from lesson observation to leading data meetings, leaders moving through the Relay program are encouraged to “see it” (examine video or live model of exemplar practice), “name it” (describe and discuss what, precisely, makes the practice effective), and “do it” (plan, practice, receive feedback, and do it again in the moment). To hear these leaders speak about the moves that go on whenever instruction is taking place is to be exposed to the nuanced range of choices and moves at a teacher’s disposal. For leaders like Jondre Pryor, the practice of classroom instruction was akin to other instances of mastery - practices that he presented as analogous to the ways skills are honed in the world of sport:

Relay always comes to my mind because the training was so powerful, it was so relevant, and it was very much applicable. The thing that really stands out about the training is the time they give you to plan and practice, and the number of times you practice. You've

probably heard sayings like, "How did Michael Jordan or Kobe Bryant become so great? They were in the gym for this crazy number of hours." Relay kind of used that same mantra. They were able to give very relevant, real-life examples, connect them to what's happening in the classroom, and to make that through-line crystal clear to you.

Pryor went on to describe the minutiae of these processes in a manner that reinforced the sporting analogy. He talked about how the “See it, Name it, Do it” model of improvement adopted from Relay allowed him to show a teacher an instructional exemplar and then to ask the question: “What’s the gap here between the example and what we saw in your classroom?” The teachers with whom he works are invited to answer that question with a level of detailed reflection that leaves few potential actions, decisions or gestures unexamined. Here, Pryor affects the language of a typical coach and shares how he would invite the reflection:

So it's getting that person to see it, and you say, "Oh, this happened, that happened. You did this. You were slanting or perching this way. You were doing this to give the effect that you were looking at the kids and paying attention to what they're doing." If they stood there in one single solitary space you might ask them something like, "So you saw that, what do you think your next action step is?" And most of the time it's illuminated through the own person's reflection, "My next action step is to make sure I'm circulating, I'm peeking around, pretending I'm peeking around a corner to show the scholars that I'm paying attention to them." That totally changed the way that we did things here.

In Pryor’s hands, feedback and reflection do not arrive at a dead end. The conversation flows inevitably towards the idea of “next time” because there will be a next time: an opportunity to reteach the same content and employ the lessons learned to date. Other such approaches to feedback we encountered were also iterative in nature and respected the notion of developing one’s craft - an approach that Dwight Ho Sang refer to as, “building the muscle memory to make sure you really know what you’re supposed to do next.”

Clearing the Path so Feedback Can Thrive

Since feedback and deliberate improvement cannot happen without dedicated time and attention, this too became a question of prioritization for these school leaders. To meet the need, they were able to get creative in how to make the most of the time and organizational capacity at their disposal. These leaders realized that development doesn't stop at the bounds of feedback sessions in much the same way that student learning is not limited to the beginning and end of class. Dwight Ho Sang underlined this when he spoke about a recent conversation he had with another principal who was questioning how any school could reasonably fit in all this work on feedback and growth. Ho Sang's response was telling of his own philosophy and approach:

"It's not just about the actual meeting, so you get the meeting out of your head. What's the transferable skill that we're trying to have all teachers master for impact? Is it their content knowledge in general or their lesson execution? You have to be smart about it."

Other leaders picked up on one of the key tools in Relay's approach to feedback: using video as a way to open up the learning and development of their teachers. Firstly, they cite that the use of video allowed them to expand the opportunities for development. With video, teachers or leaders could capture practice in action and share with their coach asynchronously. In addition, video opened up the possibility for teachers to observe their own practice and that of their colleagues with a regularity that simply wouldn't happen with live observation.

Christina Sylvetser spoke about how video allowed her to "showcase teachers at various stages of implementation effectiveness" and "for them to be able to see each other be vulnerable in front of one another and give feedback."

This attention to the vulnerability and openness required for an effective feedback culture to take root was another telling trend. These leaders respected the fact that being observed is not always a comfortable experience, regardless of the confidence or tenure of the teacher. These leaders spoke to the importance of video as part of a strategy for mitigating the tension that comes with a

live observation. They also showed how they were able to 'walk the talk' when it came to their own improvement and demonstrate vulnerability in their own growth. Christina Sylvetser showed us what this can look like when she spoke of her own interaction with videoed practice:

Regularly, my instructional leadership team meeting is filmed. If you get five minutes notice, no worries. Once you build that culture, I think it's really awesome for accountability, transparency, growth and vulnerability... It's awesome to be able to get feedback on your own practice as a leader, to showcase the observation feedback conversation using the "See it, Name it, Do it" protocol with your teachers, and have them give you feedback.

Indeed, we found accounts of feedback cultures where reticence and uncertainty gave way to a hunger for improvement. Leslie Frazier spoke about how videotaping instruction had "taken off" to such an extent that "People want to see it. They want to play it back. They want to say, 'Oh, I said that, or I didn't adequately articulate my story, or this is where I could have done better in the actual lesson.'" Rather than the old model of observation-as-compliance, these leaders spoke to the virtues of feedback-as-growth and feedback-as-accountability.

In one instance, under Leslie Frazier's leadership at Crispus Atticus, teachers' commitment to the process of continuous improvement was such that they were open to the idea of an entirely new take on one of the staples of school life:

We took the parent-teacher conference, and we didn't do one-on-one with parents. We did a teach... we taught the strategy, so parents understand what they're looking at. When you have expectations for the student to mimic the strategy, you want the parent to be facilitators of the process. But they need to understand it first, so they had the opportunity to come in on parent-teacher conference night and see the teacher teach the actual strategy.

The approach to collective development and vulnerability in growth demonstrated here is indicative of a school

that has immersed itself in the practice to such an extent that it is prepared to extol its virtues and live them out for the whole community to see. One can only imagine what the effect must have been on those parents who arrived at the school for the parent-teacher conference expecting the same routine. One can also imagine what this communicated to parents about the teachers' commitment to their craft and, by extension, the children in their care.

What the research tells us...

When it comes to what we now know about the practice of practice across a range of domains, one thing has become clear: not all practice is created equal, and not all practice yields the same effects. Prominent myths around the role of practice have persisted over time, particularly in the educational realm.

These misconceptions have promoted the belief that volume of practice is at least as important as the nature and quality of that practice, giving rise to the twin costs of "labor-in-vain" (Karpicke et al, 2009) and the 'illusion of competence' (Koriat & Bjork, 2005). The myth that expertise is innate has also been debunked, with scholars like Anders Ericsson pointing us instead towards the conditions that give rise to optimal learning (the learner demonstrates sufficient motivation to improve, teachers incorporate the learner's preexisting knowledge into the task design, and the teacher provides immediate useful feedback and knowledge of results).

While Ericsson acknowledges that these core conditions are integral to effective learning, he goes on to suggest that "deliberate practice" stands apart in that it isolates and targets vital areas of growth aligned to an end goal. This kind of deliberate practice is, according to Ericsson, what differentiates experts from non-experts:

Deliberate practice entails engaging in a focused, typically planned training activity designed to improve some aspect of performance. During deliberate practice, individuals receive immediate informative feedback on their performance and then can repeat the same or similar tasks with full attention toward changing inferior

or incorrect responses, thus improving 26 the identified area of weakness. (Duckworth et al, 2010, p. 174)

This picture of practice, one which is intentional, focuses on important and challenging tasks, and which is rigorous in nature, is a core pedagogical approach that drives and hones expertise across a range of disciplines.

Research also tells us that when principals spend more time dedicated to teacher coaching and evaluation, predictable positive achievement gains are the result (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013). More specifically, it has been shown that individualized performance feedback for teachers is integral to the success of evaluation systems in improving teacher performance (Taylor & Tyler, 2012).



The Context of Change

Appreciating the Time and Place for Change

Relay's work to capture and codify positive outliers in leadership has found change management to be a core competency of effective leadership. In keeping with this, its programs invite participants to appreciate the context within which change is happening as a key consideration. The leaders we interviewed all understood that change happens within unique contexts and communities. Each leader relied on an understanding of their context to identify where there was readiness for reform, and each was able to strategize and organize accordingly. We heard principals tell us about the conversations that preceded the changes they saw across their schools and the energy that existed behind the collective desire to improve. In one example, Anthony Asmus at Centennial Elementary shared the origins of a school-wide shift in strategy toward student referrals:

We had a conversation three years ago about: "Are we happy with 500 referrals a year? Are we ready for a change?" And they all said, "Yes. We are ready for something different." So as we rolled this out together, the teachers were right there with me the whole time.



Asmus told us how he entered into this discussion with the community by defining the problem in specific and tangible terms. For him, the reality and specificity of "500 referrals per year" was not only impossible to refute, it was something that the faculty could (and had to) own as part of their responsibility. By highlighting a problem with such obvious and troubling symptoms, Asmus shared how he directed attention to understanding its root causes and arrived at interventions specifically designed to address the issue:

A big thing about the change is we did not go all in with every strategy all the way. We started with just a few things, with some routines...and then we added to that as we progressed. So the change process just can't be all at once. It has to be small, incremental steps, based on needs.

Principal Sylvester at Merrill Middle offered a similar take on the context of her work, her school's preparedness for change, and the nature of the response to such needs. Sylvester spoke about how she and her faculty "weren't proud of the way we ended" the previous school year when it came to student culture. As a result, a "crystal clear focus" on student culture drove the collective approach to change for the coming school year. As with Asmus' approach, the need for change and the terms of that change were not generalized. Instead, Sylvester described specific interventions for specific contextual needs:

We wanted to come strong with routines and procedures. So that started from the minute the kids entered the building with entry procedures and assigned supervisory responsibilities. We completely overhauled our lunchroom protocol, and we also overhauled the way that we develop our paraprofessionals and other supports in the lunchroom. So we found that engaging in the "see it, name it, do it" protocol for professional development with lunchroom staff around student culture was incredibly impactful, and gave them ownership over that practice.



Schools Don't Change, People in Schools Change

The leaders we met also acknowledged that the people involved in change are inextricably part of the contextual fabric of the school and are integral to its success. They shared that if the need for change is felt by everyone in the school community, then the processes of change must implicate everyone who stands to be affected. Indeed, it was clear to us upon talking to these school leaders that a robust connection existed between the experiences and expectations of the adults in the building and the students they hoped to serve. Whenever we explored the context of change and saw examples of systems designed for learning, alignment between goals, or the instruments used to achieve those ends, there was a strong sense that the student and teacher experiences of those phenomena were more alike than they were different. One of the best examples of how this played out was summed up by Jondre Pryor when he described how a changing attitude to the role of student work and data permeated across the school through a series of symmetrical relationships:

I need to be looking at data every week around my schools and my principals. My principals need to be looking at their data, the academic data and the cultural data, but mainly the academic data, "How did we do last week?" They need to be looking at that with their APs. Their APs in turn need to be looking at that with their teachers. The teachers need to be

showing the scholars their data... (and then) the kids are thoroughly invested in the data. So when you've got it down all the way from me to a principal to an AP to a teacher to the scholars, everybody's invested, everybody is super focused on data, and the (outcomes) improve.

All these leaders acknowledged the context within which their improvement efforts were playing out. They saw the change taking place as something that the school community reasonably agreed upon as being timely (or even overdue); they saw it as centered around a problem that was easy to define and difficult to refute; and the nature of the interventions they employed were specific to the defined need, as well as being iterative in nature. For them, it was clear that change was not a one-off event but instead operated along an arc where new and more productive habits would be formed. These leaders also understood at an implicit level that change happened within a context and that everyone was implicated in that change, oftentimes in similar, even symmetrical ways. In response to the specific demands of their context, they were able to establish systems, structures and subsequent habits for the benefit of teachers and students alike.



The Right Tool for the Right Job

Our leaders were able to employ the tools they had acquired from their experiences at Relay and elsewhere, which resulted in demonstrable and positive change. These school leaders were also able to adapt the tools they had at their disposal to meet the contextually-specific challenges they faced. Many of the leaders we encountered were quick to say how, in hindsight, it was clear that they already possessed many of the raw materials they needed to bring about the change they hoped to affect. For them, the tools they picked up at Relay added value by inviting them to see what resources they already had at their disposal, to more effectively formalize or systematize these practices, and then to apply those new approaches in ways that were context-specific. This was true for Dwight Ho Sang at KIPP West Atlanta who shared how Relay helped his team to acknowledge what had been hiding in plain sight:

When we were coming back [from Relay] and trying to make some key changes, it was really around just pushing for student achievement and saying, "Hey, you all do some of these things already, and now we have a name for it. Isn't that awesome? You can actually name what you do. So let's just dig in and make it happen."

In the same way, Anthony Asmus had good instincts around what he needed to move the needle for his students - but only after his time at Relay was he able to give a face and a name to the specific tools that would get him there:

I was a principal for 15 years before I went to Relay, and I always searched for those tools. Sometimes I searched for those tools that were out there. Asking, "What am I going to use here?" And when I went to Relay, the specific strategies around observation feedback, on what specifically to look for and what to say and how to move teachers was a great strategy to employ. The use of data teams and how to use data teams by looking at student work and finding the gap, and targeting that gap was a great tool.

Asmus' list of the tools that helped him with his own leadership resonated with many of the other principals with whom we met. Indeed, they went into their own detail to show how they adopted and adapted Relay's tools to drive change in their schools. When it came to the overseeing of existing school structures such as time management, Siobhan Gardner spoke at length about how Relay's approaches helped her team maximize their impact. For Gardner, the larger systems informing the practices of the school had always existed but time utilization at a specific and nuanced level proved to be a clear growth area:

Before Relay, I think we always had the macrostructures. We probably just weren't using them as wisely as we could have. So we always had a space for department meetings for 4:15 to 5:15. Were department meetings happening consistently? No. Probably because we didn't know how to make them meaningful, whereas once we had the platform and we had a play, okay, we're gonna have a department meeting every week, and we're gonna look at data, easy, done. So the macrostructure was there. I think we used it better once we had a way to make really good use of time.

What the research tells us...

The challenge of adopting best practices and adapting them to the idiosyncrasies of one's own context is one of the most pervasive in education. Pascale, Sternin and Sternin (2010) have commented on this phenomenon, suggesting that the "conventional approach to borrowing best practices and implementing top-down strategies that inspire few and accomplish little" fall foul of ignoring the social system, unique to each community, within which those strategies are attempting to take hold. This phenomenon is true of school systems hoping to scale practices across communities, but it can also be seen playing out at the level of individual schools when faced with the prospect of adopting a new approach.

Just as this refining of time utilization at the school level was transformed in the light of her time at Relay, so was principal Gardner's management of time at the individual level. She went on to explain how "Relay helped me to understand the better uses of my time." Notice how Gardner changed the way her morning started, as well as the impact of the change:

I decided my main job from 7:10 to 8:00 is to greet every single teacher and every single child and just kind of check in with people, get a pulse on how they're feeling. Are they happy? Are they sad? Are they tired? Do they need anything? And I think it goes a long way for the community to know that every single day I'm going to prioritize making eye contact with you and just seeing if you're okay and what do you need if not. That I got from Relay.

This approach was common among a number of the principals we encountered - leaders who understood that they needed to make certain changes and who had an inkling around what would work in context - but who still needed the specific tools for the job at hand. Christina Sylvester at Merrill Middle talked about how her approach to feedback and data improved after she adopted Relay

strategies and adapted them to her context:

When I think about Relay, I think it provided me with copious tools to do my job better...It's been awesome to have gone through Relay for a year, and then now see the fruits of the systems that are school-wide and fleshed out. But like with any tools, you have to implement them...I can only lead how I lead. I believe in the protocols and processes, and I also believe in using those distilled down pieces that are highest leverage, and infusing them with the culture of your school...I think that there's this piece about authenticity that you're able to authentically apply the tools that you learn at Relay in your context in a way that makes sense for you, and can be impactful. But the key is to apply the tools.

Sylvester draws a distinction between this approach and the professional and leadership development experiences she encountered in the past. In these examples, drawn from her Relay experience, she was encouraged to pick up the strategies directly aimed at improving instructional outcomes for students, adapt them accordingly, and employ them within the context of the school.



Conclusion

Relay's commitment to leadership development is grounded in research-based approaches that aim to bring about transformative change in schools and improved outcomes for students. It was clear from our encounters with these outstanding principals and Leadership Program alumni that a systematized approach to improvement lives in their intentional commitment to the same levers of change Relay espouses through its own work: prioritizing their function as an instructional leader; grounding decisions in a deep understanding of student work and data; building opportunities for deliberate practice and feedback designed to address instructional gaps and needs; and appreciating the broader context within which school improvement is taking place. Across these leaders we found evidence to suggest that: 1) it is entirely possible to make substantial gains in student achievement within a relatively short period of time; and 2) effective leaders view their roles, choose their priorities, align their time, and appreciate the context of change.

Like all of the principals we met, Siobhan Gardner understands these principles of change, as well as the vital role they play in helping others improve their schools and communities. She believes that the influence of a principal begins with core values, a sentiment reflected in her assertion that "the things you think about and talk about are the things that play out in your building." Like many of Relay's alumni, Gardner has developed a nuanced appreciation of what it takes to connect thoughts, words, and deeds into a coherent vision and strategy. She calls it "systematizing care" for her students.

This commitment to improvement, supported by the work of Relay and brought to life by outstanding principals through deliberate and effective leadership strategies, is what ultimately led to the gains we observed in student achievement across these schools. It also fostered significant pride in the school and the work being done. As Christina Sylvester put it, there is no place she would rather be than doing this work: "It's so important, honestly, to have a clear vision and focus for the school, and to have people who truly believe that there is no greener grass. The grass is green right here."







Recommendations

Prioritize instructional leadership as a core function

- The first and highest leverage function of a principal is that of an expert instructional leader.
- School leaders can achieve the efficiencies needed to prioritize instruction by thoughtfully aligning time and task.
- Communicating the priority in clear, concise and compelling terms is integral to setting a vision of change for the school.

Use student work and data to inform decision-making

- Student work and data is the most important formative resource at the principal's disposal since it constitutes the most reliable evidence for student learning.
- Student work must be analyzed closely in order to identify gaps in student understanding and to make changes to instruction as a result.
- Create time and space for teachers and teams to interact with student work on a regular basis.
- Invest in building competency around the analysis and action planning from student data.
- Data is both personal and pivotal. It can serve both as a mirror for the learning life of the school and as a roadmap for indicating the strategic direction of instructional improvement. Gaps in learning are most often the results of gaps in teaching and leading.

Use feedback loops and deliberate practice to drive improvement and growth

- Feedback is most effective when it is focused, frequent, and practice-based. This is achieved by grounding feedback in observations of exemplary practice, focusing on gaps in actual practice, and inviting teachers to plan and practice how to do it more effectively.
- Principals can and should clear the path for a culture of feedback through prioritization, alignment, and by focusing on what is actually happening rather than what we think is happening.
- Principals and coaches can make the most of the time dedicated to feedback by inviting teachers to concentrate on select areas for improvement rather than attempting to take on everything at once.

Understand the importance of context when managing change

- Listen to the school community when strategizing for change, and consider where there is willingness or preparedness for those change efforts.
- Acknowledge the people involved in any change effort. Consider how these changes will land with students and teachers, as well as the ways they will be implicated and affected.
- Adapt the tools and strategies of change to the needs of your context, but remain true to their key purpose: improving outcomes for all students.

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A woman with dark hair tied back is smiling broadly with her eyes closed. She is holding a small child in her arms, who is also smiling. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting.

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